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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the three 2001 issues of a newsletter that provides current information and research on leadership and administrative issues in early childhood education. The Summer 2001 issue examines practitioners' preferences about terminology, focusing on: (1) vocabulary used to describe the field and different program types as seen by practitioners; (2) workforce perceptions about the field; (3) workforce perceptions about titles; and (4) moving forward. The Fall 2001 issue discusses factors of early childhood workforce turnover in Illinois and California, focusing on defining turnover, the picture of turnover in each state, and the lessons learned from each example. The Winter 2001 issue discusses factors that affect success in achieving center accreditation, focusing on directors, variables that have little impact, obstacles, support factors, and the benefits of accreditation. (SD)

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Research Notes

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WINTER 2001

Achieving Center Accreditation: Factors That Impact Success

In 1985, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) launched the first voluntary system for accreditation of early childhood programs. The NAEYC initiative was followed by the introduction of accreditation systems by the National Association for Child Care Professionals (NACCP) and the National Child Care Association (NCCA). Nationwide over 10,000 early childhood programs are currently accredited.

The impact of accreditation has grown steadily.¹ Accreditation is not only seen as a benchmark of quality, it has become one of the most popular strategies for program improvement. Several states now provide higher subsidies to accredited programs and philanthropic and corporate support for technical assistance through the accreditation process has increased dramatically.² Despite accreditation's growing influence, less than one-half of programs requesting accreditation materials actually complete the process and become accredited. In an effort to explore why this is the case, the Center for Early Childhood Leadership conducted a study to examine differences between accredited and nonaccredited programs and the obstacles that directors encounter in pursuing accreditation.

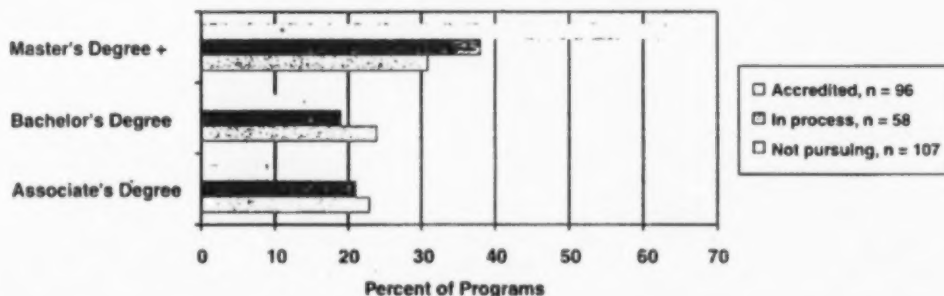
In August 2000, an accreditation survey was sent to licensed child care programs in Illinois. Of the 261 early childhood programs responding to the survey, 37% were accredited, 22% were in the self-study process, and 41% had not pursued accreditation. The sample included public and private, full-day and part-day programs. Participating centers represented the for-profit as well as nonprofit sectors and were located in geographic regions across the state.

Directors are the Driving Force

Since pursuing accreditation is voluntary, it is not surprising that the director appears to be the key variable in determining whether or not a program engages in the process. Of those programs that had pursued accreditation (n=154), two-thirds indicated that it was because of directors' self motivation rather than parental, teacher, or owner/board expectations.

When background characteristics of directors were examined, years of experience administrating an early childhood program did not predict whether or not a director had pursued accreditation. The director's level of education, on the other hand, was found to be a strong predictor of accreditation status. Sixty-three percent of directors from accredited programs reported having a master's degree or higher, compared to 38% from programs engaged in the self-study process or that had been deferred, and 31% from programs that had chosen not to pursue accreditation.

Education Level of Directors in Accredited and Nonaccredited Programs



Program Variables Have Little Impact

Program characteristics of accredited and nonaccredited centers were also examined. No significant differences surfaced for program type (part-day, full-day), legal auspices (nonprofit, for-profit), or sponsorship (e.g., Head Start, faith-based). The data regarding program size were not as definitive. One might expect larger centers to be more difficult to accredit. However, in this study, accredited centers had an

average enrollment of 129 children, compared to 105 children for programs engaged in the self-study process, and 79 children for programs that had not pursued accreditation. It is possible that larger programs had greater access to resources and a more highly educated administrative staff to facilitate the accreditation process. The three most frequently cited obstacles encountered during the self-study process were time, staff turnover, and lack of staff support. These findings are consistent with those of previous research.³

Pressing Obstacles

Directors of early childhood programs encounter obstacles when considering whether or not to pursue accreditation. The most frequently cited impediment to initiating the process was time (reported by 65% of all respondents). Those programs that chose not to pursue accreditation also indicated that the cost of accreditation materials (cited by 53% of respondents) and lack of knowledge about the process (cited by 42%) were also important obstacles.

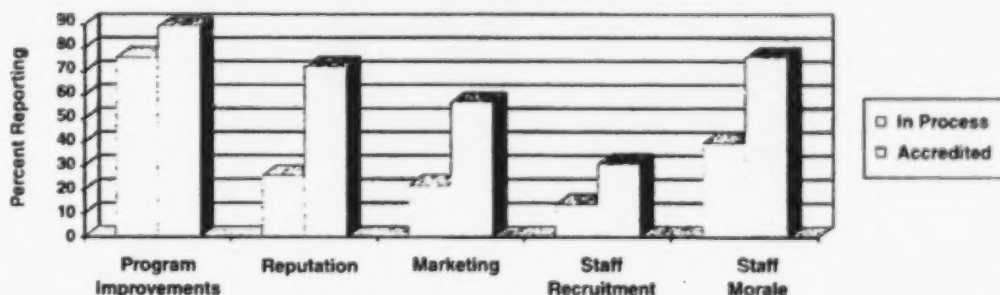
Support Makes a Difference

Given that the cost of accreditation was an obstacle for many programs, it is easy to see why directors felt grants would be the most attractive means for jumpstarting the process. Sixty-two percent of directors who had not pursued accreditation reported an interest in grants. More than half were also interested in receiving support from a consultant. Directors who had pursued accreditation reported that they took advantage of numerous resources to assist their programs during the self-study process. Workshops, grants, and consultant support were all cited as helpful. The type of support that made the most difference in achieving accreditation, however, was mentoring from other directors. Forty-two percent of directors from accredited programs reported that they received assistance from other directors with accreditation experience, compared to 29% of those who had not completed the self-study process.

The Benefits of Accreditation

Despite the obstacles, directors overwhelmingly felt that pursuing accreditation yielded important benefits. This refrain was consistent even for those who had not yet attained their ultimate goal of getting accredited. Program improvement was the most frequently cited benefit, reported by 76% of those in process and 89% of those who had achieved accreditation. Directors reported making improvements to all areas of their programs, with curriculum (65%) and physical environment (66%) mentioned most frequently. Directors from accredited programs reported additional benefits in larger numbers than those who were still in process. Enhanced reputation in the community, stronger marketing, help in recruiting new staff, and increased staff morale and commitment were all reported significantly more often from accredited programs. It appears that as directors engaged in the self study process, they immediately saw benefits from program improvements. After they had gained accreditation, other benefits became clear as well.

Perceived Benefits of Accreditation



In sum, the word about accreditation is out — fully 96% of respondents in this study reported being somewhat or very familiar with at least one type of accreditation. Directors understand the benefits of accreditation, but struggle with issues of time and lack of staff support. Directors with more formal education and those who receive mentor support from other directors with accreditation experience are most successful in achieving their goal.

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3. Talley, K. (1997). National accreditation: Why do some programs stall in self-study? *Young Children*, 52(3), 31-37.

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Research Notes

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SUMMER 2001

What's in a Name? Practitioners' Preferences About Terminology

Unlike elementary or secondary education, early childhood education has long suffered from a lack of clarity in the terminology used to describe the field and different program types. To the public, terms like *nursery school*, *preschool*, *day care*, *Head Start*, *child care*, or *prekindergarten* are confusing in contrast to terms like *kindergarten* or *elementary school*. The confusion is the result, in large part, of two intersecting traditions – care and education. Some child advocates have begun using terms like *early care* and *education* or *educare* to describe the field and acknowledge and celebrate this merging of traditions.

The lack of consistency in role nomenclature has also plagued the field. Caregiver, aide, assistant teacher, associate teacher, lead teacher, head teacher, curriculum coordinator, assistant director, director, and administrator are just some of the many terms used to describe the various roles in early childhood settings. Individuals with similar responsibilities often have different role titles depending on the auspice of their program.

The wide variety of names used to describe different program types and practitioner roles speaks to the rich diversity of the field, but may also be impeding workforce efforts for greater professional status, compensation, and career development. In the July 2000 issue of *Young Children*, NAEYC President Lynn Kagan suggested that a common nomenclature would signal our unity and force and "alert the American public to the common set of challenges we face no matter what program shingle hangs on our door."¹ More recently, Kathy Thornburg, the new President of NAEYC states, "We need a precise way to describe our profession and the components related to it."² She argues for the overarching descriptor *early childhood programs* to describe all home- or center-based programs regardless of setting, auspice, or funding source.

Practitioners' Perceptions About Terminology

As part of a larger study looking at the status of the early childhood workforce in Illinois, the Center for Early Childhood Leadership recently conducted a survey to assess practitioners' perceptions about preferred nomenclature.³ A survey titled *What's in a Name?* was sent to 2,250 teachers, administrators, and support staff working in 150 early childhood programs throughout Illinois in December 2000. Centers represented all program types – public and private, part-day and full-day, for-profit and nonprofit. In addition, approximately 175 surveys were distributed to family child care providers and others attending the Chicago Metro AEYC conference in January 2001. Of the 1,250 surveys returned, 166 were incomplete. A total of 1,084 surveys were used in the data analysis.

Workforce Perceptions About the Field

The findings of the *What's in a Name?* survey documented mixed preferences regarding the terminology used to describe the field and specific program types. While 77% of practitioners favor the term *early childhood education* to describe the field, and 60% prefer the term *preschool* to refer to a part-day program, there is less agreement about terminology for full-day programs.

Early Childhood Practitioners' Preferences for Terminology Used to Describe the Field and Different Types of Programs

QUESTION	PREFERRED DESCRIPTOR (percentage of respondents selecting each descriptor)
When the public or media refer to the field, what term would you like them to use?	77% <i>early childhood education</i> ; 11% <i>early care and education</i> ; 6% <i>child care</i> ; 6% other.
When the public or media refer to a part-day program in a center or school, what term would you like them to use?	60% <i>preschool</i> ; 13% <i>prekindergarten</i> ; 13% <i>day care</i> ; 14% other.
When the public or media refer to a full-day program in a center or school, what term would you like them to use?	32% <i>preschool</i> ; 28% <i>child care</i> ; 17% <i>day care</i> ; 16% <i>prekindergarten</i> ; 7% other.
When the public or media refer to a full-day program in a home, what term would you like them to use?	52% <i>family child care</i> ; 19% <i>family day care</i> ; 14% <i>child care</i> ; 15% other.

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Workforce Preferences About Role Titles

The results of the survey showed that 79% of respondents expressed a desire for greater consistency in role titles across different early childhood settings. Practitioners expressed a strong consensus in their preferred titles for certain positions, but less agreement for other titles. The terms *assistant teacher*, *teacher*, *assistant director*, and *director* appear to be favorite choices of titles for these positions. Respondents were less in agreement about their preferred term for the individual on staff who coordinates the curriculum and mentors those directly responsible for the care and education of children.

Workforce Preferences for Role Titles

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY	PREFERRED ROLE TITLE (percentage of respondents selecting role title)
Works under the direct supervision of another teacher in the care and education of a group of children.	69% assistant teacher; 11% aide; 10% support teacher; 10% other.
Has direct responsibility for the care and education of a group of children.	93% teacher; 4% caregiver; 3% other.
Coordinates the curriculum and mentors those directly responsible for the care and education of children.	49% education coordinator; 18% head teacher; 17% lead teacher; 7% master teacher; 4% mentor teacher; 4% other.
Assists with the administration of the program and management of a center.	71% assistant director; 14% assistant administrator; 8% associate director; 4% assistant manager; 2% other.
Provides leadership and oversees the administration and management of a center.	60% director; 17% center director; 11% administrator; 7% site director; 4% manager.
Manages a home-based program and provides care and education for a group of children.	51% family child care provider; 35% home day care provider; 6% teacher; 5% caregiver; 3% other.

Respondents were also less in agreement about the preferred role title for individuals who manage home-based programs and provide care and education for a group of children. In general, practitioners do not favor the term *caregiver* as a descriptor for any of the positions, yet that term is used consistently by the public and media when referring to the early childhood workforce.

Moving Forward

The results of this study indicate that early childhood educators in Illinois recognize the need for greater consistency in nomenclature to describe the field and workforce roles. They tend to prefer traditional school-based terminology (*early childhood education* to describe the field, *preschool* to describe a part-day program, and *teacher* to describe the individual responsible for the care and education of a group of children) as opposed to other descriptors being used by the media or public.

Based on comments by practitioners, this consensus signals an awareness that greater occupational status and better leveraging for funding will result by emphasizing the educational aspects of professional practice. While respondents to the *What's in a Name?* survey acknowledge the political realities of the times, they also understand that all high-quality early childhood programs provide both nurturing care for young children and stimulating educational experiences.

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Research Notes

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FALL 2001

A Tale of Two States: Turnover in Illinois and California

For more than a decade, research has documented the relationship between compensation and the quality and stability of the early childhood workforce.¹ Compensation levels for teaching staff have consistently surfaced as a strong predictor of staff turnover.² Recent research conducted in Illinois and California provides additional insight into the nature of turnover and possible remedies to reduce the alarmingly high rate of turnover in the field.

Defining Turnover

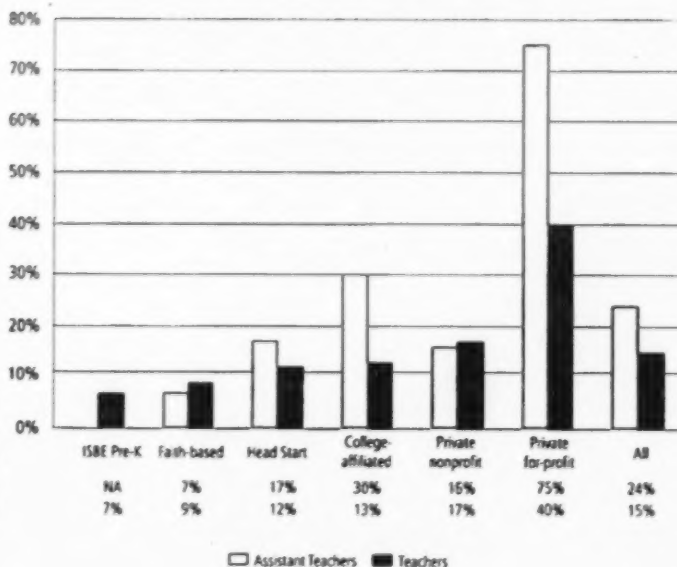
There are three types of turnover in early childhood settings. **Job turnover** occurs when a teacher leaves a center to take a position in another early childhood program either voluntarily or involuntarily. **Position turnover** occurs when a teacher takes a different position within the same center either through a promotion or because of staff changes; and **Occupational turnover** occurs when a worker leaves the early childhood field altogether. While job turnover and position turnover do not involve a loss of talent to the field, all three types of turnover can have a detrimental effect on children by undermining the stability and consistency so important in caregiver relations.

The Illinois Picture

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRRA) recently conducted research on the status of the early childhood workforce in Illinois.³ The results published in the final report *Who's Caring for the Kids?* provide turnover data on more than 1,100 early childhood programs in the state.

Turnover of teaching staff varies by both program type and position. Overall, annual turnover rates average 24% for assistant teachers and 15% for teachers. These averages, however, mask the enormous variation that exists among programs. Some programs are very stable and experience no turnover during the course of a year, while other programs have a constant influx of new staff and experience 150% turnover of staff annually. Turnover in Illinois is lowest in ISBE State-funded Pre-K programs.

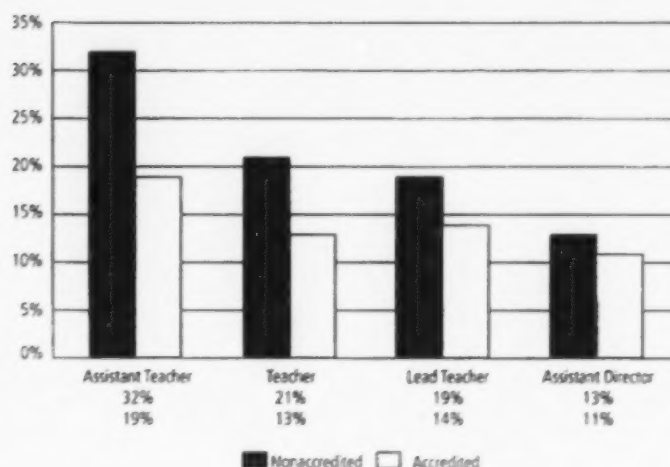
Annual Turnover of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers and Teachers by Program Type



An analysis of the Illinois turnover data reveals that the least qualified and lowest paid staff leave the field in higher numbers than more qualified staff receiving higher salaries. Teachers tend to make a commitment to the field if they have at least an associate's degree, but will leave for better paying jobs within the field as they obtain higher degrees and credentials. For example, a classroom teacher who pursues and acquires a bachelor's degree may leave a Head Start program to seek employment in an ISBE Pre-K program.

In Illinois, programs that have achieved accreditation experience lower levels of turnover than nonaccredited programs. Turnover of assistant teachers in accredited programs is 13% lower than in nonaccredited programs. For teachers, the difference in turnover between accredited and nonaccredited programs is 8%. This differential may be related to compensation levels. Lead teachers in accredited programs make 10% more than those with similar positions and credentials in nonaccredited programs.

Turnover in Accredited and Nonaccredited Early Childhood Programs by Role



The California Picture

A recent report published by the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW) examined the effects of the staffing crisis on efforts to improve and maintain center-based quality. *Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994-2000* summarizes longitudinal data collected in 75 child care centers in three California communities over several years.

The researchers found that the average turnover rate between 1999 and 2000 was 30% for all teaching staff. Even more alarming, 76% of all teaching staff employed in the centers in 1996 were no longer on the job in 2000 and new teaching staff as a whole were significantly less well educated than those they replaced. Not surprising, wages were found to be a significant determinant of teacher turnover. Among all teachers who had completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood, there were significant differences in the wages of those who stayed and those who had left. This difference translates to over \$6,000 per year for full-time staff.

The California study found that between 1996 and 2000, NAEYC-accredited programs continued to demonstrate higher overall quality than other nonaccredited programs. However, unlike in Illinois, accredited programs in California did not experience significantly lower turnover among staff nor did they pay higher levels of compensation.

One of the goals of the *Then & Now* study was to determine which variables predict whether or not a program will be able to sustain a high level of quality over time. The researchers concluded that programs that have a greater percentage of highly trained, consistent staff are better able to sustain high levels of program quality. The authors conclude highly skilled teachers are more likely to remain at their jobs if they earn higher than average wages, and work with a higher percentage of well-trained teaching staff who also remain on the job.

Lessons Learned from Illinois and California

The Illinois study provides a panoramic snapshot of the status of the early childhood workforce in the state; the California study provides a close-up picture of a select group of programs over time. Together, both studies provide compelling evidence as to why turnover exists and how it can be reduced.

- There are wide disparities in the qualifications required and the compensation paid for comparable work in different early childhood settings. These disparities, fueled by funding and regulatory inequities, are major contributors to turnover.
- Centers paying higher wages are better able to retain qualified teachers and sustain higher levels of program quality.
- Accreditation has a positive impact on overall program quality by reducing staff turnover and creating a more stable workforce provided that the staff is paid higher than average wages.
- Training incentives and salary bonuses can help expand the pool of qualified personnel who work with children in the same program over an extended period of time.

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